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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: DECEMBER 24, 2009

Summary: The NRO verdict continues to shape media content. Nearly all major dailies led with the State spokesman's comments that the Supreme Court ruling on the NRO is an "internal matter for the Pakistani government" and that the U.S. continues "to work closely with the government of President Zardari." Many papers also front-paged President Zardari's pledge to General Kayani to continue to provide necessary resources for the fight against militants, calling it an important meeting given the current political atmosphere. Statements by Special Representative Holbrooke received wide coverage. Highlighting his interview with Charlie Rose, several papers quoted Holbrooke's statement that the U.S. is watching carefully as the "major [NRO] political drama" unfolds in Islamabad. The lead headline in Nawa-i-Waqt today misquoted Holbrooke, declaring that he has admitted the presence of American intelligence and special operations forces in Pakistan. [Holbrooke's assertion that no U.S. troops are in Pakistan, although U.S. intelligence forces operate in all countries, including Pakistan, were widely covered yesterday.] The Nation reported on an accident involving a speeding U.S. Consulate Peshawar vehicle that yesterday injured one person. Economic reporting headlined the IMF's approval of a \$1.2 billion payment to Pakistan. Several papers published reports and photos of Ambassador Patterson's reception with Pakistani women economists who received USAID-funded scholarships to pursue a Master's degree in economics in the United States. End Summary

TOP STORIES

News Story: U.S. Not To Interfere If Zardari Goes "The News" (12/24)

"The United States further distanced itself from the beleaguered Zardari government on Wednesday when the State Department stated clearly that if there was a legal judgment that changes the status of the government, 'it is really an internal matter for Pakistan.' State Department spokesman Philip Crowley was asked, at a press briefing about the U.S. opinion or concerns if the government of President Zardari were to be deemed unconstitutional and, therefore, illegitimate." (Story also covered in all newspapers)

News Story: NRO Dispute No Threat To U.S. Interests: Holbrooke "Dawn" (12/24)

"The United States views the NRO dispute as a 'tremendous political drama,' which has so far not affected U.S. national security interests but has caused Washington to watch it 'very carefully,' says Richard Holbrooke. Mr. Holbrooke, America's special representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan, also acknowledged in an interview to a private U.S. television channel that the Obama

administration faced a dilemma in dealing with Pakistan as unlike Afghanistan it could not send its troops there to fight Al Qaeda and Taliban in Fata and needed to find other means to tackle them."
(Story also covered in all newspapers)

News Story: Holbrooke Denies Working on Indo-Pak Ties "The News"
(12/24)

"Recognizing inter-connectedness among Afghanistan, Pakistan and India in the context of current regional challenges, a senior U.S. diplomat said Washington will support improvement in Islamabad-New Delhi relations as it would be good for South Asia. Richard Holbrooke, Special Representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan, however, denied that he was working on India-Pakistan relations, saying it is not included in his portfolio."

TERRORISM/MILITARY ISSUES

News Story: U.S. Troop Surge; Kayani Conveys Concerns To Asif, Gilani "The Nation" (12/24)

"Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani on Wednesday updated both President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, separately, about the ongoing army operation in south Waziristan.... Officials privy to these meetings told 'The Nation' that the Army Chief also explained to both the leaders about the concerns regarding the deployment of additional 30,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.... According to the officials, the President assured Gen. Kayani that the Government would meet financial, logistic, and professional requirements of the Army for the ongoing war against terrorism."

News Story: VVIP Security Ordered For Press Clubs: Key Terrorist Leaders Have Fled Country: Malik; Interior Minister Denies Having Influenced Release Of U.S. Nationals; Musharraf Govt. Signed Agreement On Movement Of U.S. Nationals - "Daily Times" (12/24)

"Interior Minister Rehman Malik on Wednesday praised the role of the media and clerics in the war on terror, and - citing intelligence reports - said all key terrorist leaders have fled the country. Addressing reporters at the National Press Club, Malik condemned Tuesday's suicide attack targeting the Peshawar Press Club, and ordered VVIP security for press clubs across the country.... The minister denied that he influenced the release of U.S. nationals who were apparently detained on charges of carrying illegal weapons. He also claimed that an agreement on the movement of U.S. nationals in Pakistan was inked during former president Pervez Musharraf's tenure. Malik challenged the presence of U.S. private security agency Blackwater in the country, and said, 'I can confirm on the basis of reports filed by the three elite intelligence agencies that there is no Blackwater in the country.'"

News Story: Thousands Of Taliban Sent To Afghanistan, Claims Wali "Dawn" (12/24)

"'Thousands of Taliban fighters' have been sent to Afghanistan to join the war against U.S.-led NATO troops, according to the South Waziristan Chief of Taliban, Waliur Rehman. Talking to reporters in the Shaktoai area, he said the move was consistent with Taliban strategy of 'waging a guerilla war' against Pakistani forces and a small number of 'our fighters are sufficient to engage the troops in Waziristan.'" (Story also covered in all newspapers)

News Story: 12 Militants Killed In Bajaur "The News" (12/24)

"Security forces killed 12 militants and destroyed their three hideouts during action in various areas of Bajaur Agency on Wednesday, official sources said."

News Story: Taliban Acquire Capability to Hack U.S. Drones? "The News" (12/24)

"some of the militant groups in Iraq and Afghanistan have become capable of intercepting live video feeds from U.S. Predator drones, potentially providing them with information they need to evade or monitor U.S. military operations, Senior U.S. Defence and Intelligence officials said."

POLITICAL ISSUES

News Story: Trial Of Civilians In Military Courts: NA Body Rejects Amendments "Daily Times" (12/24)

"The National Assembly Standing Committee on Defence on Wednesday rejected amendments related to trial of civilians in military courts - introduced during the Pervez Musharraf's regime - in the Pakistan Army Act."

ECONOMY/ENVIRONMENT

News Story: IMF Approves Release Of \$1.2 Billion "Dawn" (12/24)

"The International Monetary Fund approved a \$1.2 billion tranche for Pakistan on Wednesday after concluding a review of the country's economic performance. 'It is of course important that Pakistan has full support from donors because they've had shocks to their economy over the past year,' Carline Atkinson, IMF's Director for External Affairs, told an earlier briefing." (Story also covered in all newspapers)

News Story: U.S. Scholarships For Female Economists "The News," "The Frontier Post," "The Statesman," "Ausaf," "Aaj Kal," "Pakistan" (12/24)

"U.S. Ambassador Anne W. Patterson at a reception in Islamabad on Wednesday congratulated recipients of the 2009 Women's Leadership Training in Economics (WLTIE) scholarship awards, as they prepare to start a two-year master's degree program in the United States in January. The program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, seeks to develop a new generation of women economists, who will become leaders in economic policy-making and serve as role models for the future generations."

MISCELLANEOUS

News Story: 'U.S. Consulate' Vehicle Leaves Man injured "The Nation" (12/24)

"An over speeding vehicle carrying officials of U.S. consulate and Intelligence Operators in Peshawar on Wednesday rammed into another car and resultantly the driver of the latter vehicle received serious injuries."

EDITORIALS/OPINIONS

Editorial: Peshawar Press Club Attack, an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (12/24)

"Words are not enough to condemn the suicide bomb attack on the Peshawar Press Club on Tuesday. The attack has grave implications for the media and its role in fighting militancy in Pakistan.... This is the first time such an attack has taken place and it appears that the militants are now desperate and realize that they are perhaps losing support of even those sections in the media that had at times been accused of boosting Taliban efforts to propagate extremism. It is about time the government tightened security for journalists and their institutions."

Editorial: Press In The Crosshairs, an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (12/24)

"The timing of the terrorist attack is of significance. It seems that the terrorists now believe that they have lost the battle in the media. When the war on terror began, large parts of the media were sympathetic towards the Taliban, dubbing the war as the United States' and not our own.... It is time we recognize that the media, education and democracy are the prime targets of the terrorists' ideology. We must fight them collectively in a united manner and not let ourselves be fooled by the 'good Taliban, bad Taliban' refrain any longer."

Editorial: Media Under Attack, an editorial in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (12/24)

"It seems obvious that the militants are determined to slay others. Mercifully the bomber carrying a large load of explosives was unable

to enter the club. There is no guarantee that the next time around media people will be as fortunate. All that can be done is to put as much security as is feasible in place, act with vigilance and hope the bombers will never succeed in their purpose of stopping professionals from bringing the truth before people."

Editorial: In Peshawar, Press Club Now A Terrorist Target, an editorial in the country's premier business newspaper, "Business Recorder" (cir. 25,000) (12/24)

"What sets apart the bombing of the Peshawar Press Club from prevalent anti-media violence is that the militants have targeted

the very base of a free media, which never shirked from giving space to their point of view. But for the courageous reporting by journalists who suffered extensive casualties in conflict zones as collateral damage, the Taliban would have been nothing but bandits in the thick jungle or distant mountains. By attacking the Peshawar Press Club, the militants have sent out the unmistakable signal that they have nothing left to sell to the people. That's an admission of their defeat in the face of the security operations. Therefore, it would be a fatal mistake to think that they are done with the murderous attack on the Peshawar Press Club, they can attack others as well."

Editorial: Pakistan's 'Decision' To Say No To Expansion In Drone Attacks, an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro-Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (12/24)

"Foreign Minister Qureshi has said that Pakistan would neither allow any expansion in the U.S. drone attacks nor would it accept foreign troops on its territory. This statement is nothing less than a cruel joke with the nation because it means that currently the U.S. is conducting such attacks after obtaining permission from the government. In fact, Washington does not bother to seek permission from Islamabad to launch attacks inside Pakistan. Under these circumstances, Mr. Qureshi's utterance seems devoid of any significance. We think the Pakistani nation will have to decide for itself how long it will continue to bear the U.S. interference in our internal affairs?"

Editorial: America's Afghan Policy And Pakistan's Suggestions, an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (12/24)

"[Addressing the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee], Foreign Minister Shah Mehmud Qureshi has clearly told the U.S. that Pakistan will not tolerate expansion of the drone attacks to Quetta and foreign troops intervention in any Pakistani area.... Committee members stressed that America and Afghanistan must be told that using Afghan soil against Pakistan would have dangerous consequences. According to the committee, the U.S. must also be informed about Indian conspiracies against Pakistan and its interference in Balochistan. It seems that the U.S. administration is not willing to listen. Pakistan should increase pressure on the U.S. through its other friends. France, Britain and other countries need to be informed that measures taken blindly would be detrimental for the war on terror."

Editorial: Pakistan's Reservations At The New U.S. Afghan Policy, an editorial in the liberal Urdu daily "Express" (circ. 25, 000) (12/24)

"Briefing the National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmud Qureshi has said that Pakistan would neither tolerate drone strikes in Quetta nor foreign troops on its soil.... Afghan affairs experts say that if the U.S. changes its strategy in Afghanistan instead of increasing troops, it would have better results. NATO troops should launch an operation against extremists in Afghanistan just as Pakistani troops have conducted the operation against terrorists. But the situation is such that the moment Pakistan started an operation in South Waziristan, U.S. removed its posts along the Durand Line, due to which lots of people got the chance to flee into Pakistan. No one has tried to ask why these posts were removed; nor did Pakistan complain to the U.S. about it. President Obama must try to improve the situation if he wants success in Afghanistan."

Editorial: Occupied Kashmir: India Must Accept That It Is A Disputed Area, an editorial note in the second-largest, nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (12/24)

"[According to the Times of India] the World Bank has refused to accept Occupied Kashmir as a part of India.... This decision by the World Bank has indeed sent shivers down the spines of the Indian and Occupied Kashmir governments. Pakistan and other countries of the world frequently remind India that Pak-India relations cannot come on the track until the resolution of Kashmir issue. The region cannot see peace until this core issue is resolved. International powers and the UN must strive to get UN resolutions on the issue implemented."

(All circulation figures are based on estimation)
Patterson